

**In MCA, the fight is for power and money**  
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**BY EILEEN NG**

Two seemingly unconnected incidents in MCA last week seemed to have a common denominator: Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek is consolidating his grip as president ahead of the party's December polls.

A day after veteran politician Datuk Lee Hwa Beng was sacked purportedly for inviting an opposition leader to his book launch last year, MCA deputy president Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai found himself facing "censure" for dereliction of duties at a hastily-convened October 20 extraordinary general meeting (EGM).

The two back-to-back incidents set tongues wagging that Dr Chua and those aligned to him are getting rid of dissidents to pave a smooth path for either him or his anointed successor to take control of the party that is sitting on RM2 billion worth of assets.

"It is quite obvious isn't it?" party elder and former deputy president Tan Sri Lim Ah Lek told The Malaysian Insider when asked whether there was a move to get rid of those critical of the president.

Both Lee and Liow, who is eyeing the top post, had been openly harsh with Dr Chua in recent times, with Lee admitting that he was starting an "Anything But Chua Soi Lek" movement as the 66-year-old leader was seen as a disgrace to both the party and the Chinese community because of a sex scandal.

Although Dr Chua had declared earlier he would not defend his presidency, his recent actions raised speculation that the Johor-born politician was preparing to change his tune.

So why are Dr Chua and Liow fighting to lead a party that was virtually rejected by Malaysians at the ballot box in the May 5 general election when it saw its share of federal seats halved to seven, from 15 in Election 2008?

The answer: money and power.

The senior Chinese party in the ruling Barisan Nasional has a list of assets, including the 43-storey Grade A office block Menara Multi-Purpose that generates a RM2 million monthly income and its prized headquarters, Wisma MCA. Both are located in prime locations in capital city Kuala Lumpur.

It also owns a 42.4% stake in Malaysia's largest-circulation English daily, The Star. Since 2010, income from the properties and dividends from The Star has earned the party some RM320 million.

"The money can be channelled back to the party's war chest, and whoever is the president will have a say on how it will be distributed or spent. In short, it can be used to induce loyalty," said a party warlord.

The presidency also brings with it the power to recommend posts at various level of government and government-linked agencies, and recommend honorific titles bestowed by the Federal and state governments to loyalists, which will further cement the president's

position.

Liow Tiong Lai is locked in a power struggle with MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek. Liow Tiong Lai is locked in a power struggle with MCA president Dr Chua Soi Lek. There is still much interest in getting government posts as evident in the other three EGM resolutions to overturn its decision not to accept those posts.

That decision was made because it fared badly in the 13th general election, ending up with only seven parliamentary and 11 state seats, down from the 15 parliamentary and 32 state seats it won in the 2008 national polls.

Putrajaya is also keeping the transport ministry portfolio available for MCA, and it is temporarily headed by Umno vice-president Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

"This incessant bloodletting and conflict is not going to produce any winners as they have already fared badly in the general election.

"They are taking on each other in an attempt to gain control and this inability to work together is telling you the character of their leadership and their political opportunism," said Centre for Policy Initiative director Dr Lim Teck Ghee.

At the end of the day, the 6.9 million Chinese community that MCA professes to represent is the totem its leaders brandishes before the audience but the reality is that they are only looking out for their own interests, say critics.

"MCA is at a crossroads. If the players are still the same, it may eventually be irrelevant unless it has new blood and new leadership who understands why people abandoned them," said Universiti Sains Malaysia's Associate Prof Dr Sivamurugan Pandian. - October 8, 2013.

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